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THE MORAL POWER OF THE SACRED SCRIPTURES

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SERMON I.*

BY T. MEREDITH,

OF RALEIGH, N. C.

THE MORAL POWER OF THE SACRED SCRIPTURES.

JEREMIAH xxiii. 29.—*Is not my word like as a fire? saith the Lord; and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?*

THAT the oracles of Divine truth are invested with a power, sufficient to subdue the most stubborn dispositions of men, and, eventually, to renovate the moral elements of States, Empires, and the world—is a proposition capable of the most direct and conclusive proof. Whether this property is to be ascribed to the inherent energy of the simple word, or to the accompanying action of the Holy Spirit, or to both these agencies together, it is no part of my present business to inquire. My sole object, on this occasion, shall be to enlarge upon the doctrine above stated; and particularly to show the evidence of its truth, and its practical bearing on the interests of society.

That the Word of God should possess an energy, such as here ascribed to it, is precisely what might be presumed from the character of its Author, and the obvious design of its transmission. To suppose the Ruler of the world to assume the task of making a special revelation of himself to man, without having in view the attainment of an object proportionate to the magnitude of the undertaking, is to suppose him chargeable with a weakness entirely discreditable to a limited and imperfect being. To suppose the object, in the case proposed, to be any thing short of a radical amendment in the moral condition of man, would be to suppose a case of the most extraordinary incongruity between the end and the means—between the object contemplated, and the instrumentality de-

* Delivered before the North Carolina Bible Society, at its annual meeting, in November, 1836. [Printed from the manuscript.]

vised for its accomplishment. And to suppose, under such circumstances, the appointment of an instrumentality, unattended by the requisite efficiency for the attainment of its ends, would be to charge the Deity with the most surprising dullness and imbecility. In short, to suppose that the all-wise Jehovah, who can never lack either the intelligence to devise, or the strength to execute, would convict himself of the indiscretion of giving to the world a system of truth, which must, in the nature of the case, prove a dead letter—which has no moral energy, either inherent or collateral, and which is destined to exert no valuable influence on the lives and condition of men—would be to suppose, as it seems to me, what is contradicted by the plainest principles of reason and common sense. If these remarks be correct,—and that they are, will be denied, I presume, by no one,—then it must follow, that there is a clear and strong presumption, arising from the origin of the sacred record itself, in favor of the doctrine of the text—in favor of the doctrine, that the Bible is attended by a moral power appertaining to no other agency on earth, and making it competent to moral results of the most surprising and stupendous magnitude.

What is clearly deducible from the presumption of the case, is made a matter of special and express revelation. God has not left us to conjecture respecting the designs of his word, nor respecting its fitness for the ends contemplated. He has told us expressly, both in the language of prophecy and in that of history, not only what his purpose is, but also that this purpose shall be accomplished by the agency appointed. No part of the inspired page is more express or unequivocal, than the following passage from the Prophet Isaiah:—"For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from Heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater: So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it. For ye shall go out with joy and be led forth with peace: the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree; and it shall be to the Lord for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off."—Is. lv. 10—13. With this prediction I have now no further concern than to observe the fact an-

nounced, that the word of the Lord shall certainly accomplish its end; and that that end is nothing short of a thorough amendment in the moral condition of man.

What is presented in the Old Testament, in the form of prophecy, and arrayed in the richest imagery of poetical conception, is set forth, though with less beauty, yet not with less clearness, in the New. "For the word of God is quick and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."—Heb. iv. 12. If, in the former case, we have an illustration of the general influence of Divine truth, spreading itself gradually over entire communities, mollifying the moral condition of mankind, fertilizing the mountains and valleys of Zion, and multiplying and extending its fruitfulness to succeeding generations—we have, in the latter, an illustration of the same principle, operating directly on individuals—awakening the conscience, purifying the fountains of thought, and new-modelling the entire elements of the inner man. In the latter case, the effect ascribed to the inspired word is more direct and exclusive; in the former, more general and protracted. In both, however, we have a recognition, as well as an illustration, of the principle disclosed in the text—that the oracles of truth are as a hammer and a fire in breaking to pieces and in melting down the flinty dispositions of men—of forming anew the moral elements of individuals, of communities, and of the whole world.

What is taught by reason, and by the inspired record itself, is shown perhaps still more conclusively by facts—by the history of revelation and the history of the world. A few cases only can be mentioned, which must be recieved as examples of the rest. But these few will be found to be decisive; and, if I mistake not, will place the truth of the proposition beyond the reach of a possible doubt.

When the apostles of Christ received their commission on the summit of Olivet, the whole world was sunk in crime. "Darkness covered the earth and gross darkness the people." With the exception of the small province of Judea, the entire world were idolaters; the degraded and polluted worshipers of images, and of four-footed beasts, and of creeping things. And even in this trifling remnant not wholly given to idols, there was a moral darkness not less dense, and inveterate, and degrading, than in the other portions of the earth. Indeed all nations of men, all

states of society, and all ranks in life, were about equally depraved, and equally debased. The vilest lusts, the most malignant passions, the most polluted and polluting principles, and the most odious and iniquitous practices, were everywhere tolerated, commended, and honored. Even the philosophers, the lights of the world, the pride and boast of the age, whatever their attainments in science and the arts, were about equally removed from virtue, and equally sunk in crime. As for the true God, he was neither worshipped, nor respected, nor known. If the name of virtue was used at all, it was only to be perverted and insulted. And there was scarcely a vice practised or known among men, which had not been constituted a divinity and presented with divine honors. Such was the moral condition of the world—of Jews as well as Gentiles—of the learned and polite as well as the unlearned and the rude—when Jesus of Nazareth commanded his disciples to proclaim the Gospel to the world. These men obeyed the injunction of their ascended Lord. They commenced at Jerusalem and went forth among the nations. Without wealth, or friends, or personal influence; without the support of secular power; without any thing to recommend them but the purity of their lives and *the demonstration of the truth*, they prosecuted the duties of their commission. And although opposed by popular opinion and popular prejudice, by the pride and enmity of the human heart, and by the combined terrors of civil and ecclesiastical authority, yet mark the result! In less than a century the christian system had made its way over every part of the known world; and in little more than three hundred years Christianity was seated on the throne of the Cæsars, giving laws to the nations, and holding her sceptre over a converted world.

That this change constituted the most thorough, extensive, and decisive revolution that the nations of the earth had experienced or known, will be denied by no one at all qualified to judge in the case. Revolutions there had certainly been; but they had been wrought by the hand of violence, and had been confined to limited portions of territory.—Cities had been built, and had been demolished; empires had arisen, and had fallen; nations had been founded and exterminated—but all these changes were to be ascribed to the action of human force, and were as limited in the duration of their existence, as in the extent of territory to which they belonged. But the revolution of which I speak was totally different in its kind, its extent, its duration. It was not so much a change in government and laws, and in the outward

forms and institutions of society, as in morals and religion—in the dispositions, the habits, the characters of men. It was not restricted to a tribe, a nation, or an empire; but was eventually commensurate with the known population of the earth. Nor was it the ephemeral product of a few months, or a few years. It was the enduring growth of centuries, and only took deeper root as the progress of ages advanced.

That the aforesaid revolution was the effect of *revealed truth* on the hearts and consciences of men, is equally beyond the reach of a question. For the express purpose of evincing this fact, God had wisely disconnected the administration of his word with all facilities and instrumentalities which could possibly arrogate to themselves the credit of the natural effects which followed. Had Christ selected his ministers out of the rich, and noble, and powerful of the earth—had they gone forth armed with secular or ecclesiastical authority—or had they carried with them the influence which rank and fortune never fail to impart,—the inference might have been otherwise. But when it is recollected that never was undertaking prosecuted with less of human sufficiency about it; when it is considered that the persons chosen—whether their number, their natural qualifications, or their standing in society, be contemplated—were, of all others, the least calculated to secure the result that ensued; and more especially, when it is borne in mind that it was plainly beyond the power of such agents to produce such effects, the conclusion is inevitable that the revolution in question is to be imputed to the triumphant energies of revealed truth. Surely if there was ever a case in which the effect was clearly traceable to its appropriate cause, the case in hand is one. And if there has ever been a revolution produced among men, whether important or unimportant, that could be positively referred to the action of a given agent, then may the revolution in view be ascribed to the action of Divine truth.

As another example of the unparralleled efficiency of God's word, I would mention the reformation of Luther. The age of the apostles had passed away; the men of primitive times had been long in their graves; Christianity had been received into the halls of the great, and into the schools of the learned; church and State had been united, and the authority of the latter had been employed to sustain and aggrandise the former; the door of admission to the temple and to the altar, had been opened to all, and the strongest inducements had been offered to enter. Corruption had thus come in like a flood. The spirit of primitive chris-

tianity had fled, and the "Man of Sin" had swayed his iron sceptre over the world.

In those days of darkness, superstition, and crime, when the spirit of primitive godliness was departed, and the lamp of revealed truth was well nigh extinct; when an endless variety of forms had usurped the seat of the former, and the traditions of men had supplied the place of the latter; then it was that Martin Luther arose in Germany; and, soaring above the region of early prejudice, bursting loose from the fetters of long cherished habit, and defying the terrors of papal and secular domination, he dared to proclaim and defend the truth as first announced by the apostles. The effect was no less splendid than sudden and unexpected. The light of truth spread with the rapidity of the morning dawn; the consciences of men asserted their freedom; the powers of darkness were shaken; the empire of spiritual despotism was convulsed and overturned; and another revolution, but little inferior to the preceding, speedily burst upon Europe. That this revolution was vast in extent, deep and effectual in its nature, and unspeakably momentous in its consequences, will be questioned by no one. And that it owes its existence not to the wisdom, nor the will, nor the might of man; but to the unparralleled energies of primitive truth, freed from the restrictions of papal enactments, and rescued from the oblivion of papal corruption, is not less clear and undeniable.

Another convincing proof of the moral power of revelation is found in the effect of modern missions. Let the simple-hearted, unsophisticated missionary leave his home, and erect the standard of the cross on foreign shores; let him approach the untaught native in the spirit of the Gospel—in the attitude and manner of a christian disciple; let him carry with him neither wealth, nor arms, nor national consequence, nor any thing else except the simple Word of Life, and the temper and disposition of its Author; let him present the heathen with the Scriptures in their native dialect, and with the doctrines of the cross in his daily ministrations—and mark the result. He may indeed incur the reproach and displeasure of those whom he has gone to rescue; the pure and prying doctrines of the Gospel may stir up the dormant enmities of the natural heart; the arm of persecution may be raised, and the sword of personal violence may be drawn; but the seed sown will not be lost, nor will it rot in the ground; sooner or later it will take root and grow; the wild and unsubdued savage will presently begin to feel an influence, to him

before unknown; one after another will throw away his idols, and joyfully embrace the christian faith; the Word of the Lord will run and be glorified; opposition will gradually give way before the march of truth; the sword will eventually be returned to the scabbard, and the hand of friendship and of gratitude will be extended in its stead; "the church will arise and spread in the wilderness; the mountain of the Lord's house will be exalted above the hills, and all the trees of the valley will clap their hands together."

Let me not be told that all this is conjecture—that it is a mere matter of calculation, made without data and without truth. On the contrary, it is nothing short of absolute fact. It is only that which has occurred again and again since the era of modern missions, and which is even now taking place on the right hand and the left. Look, for example, at the islands of the Pacific, the Indian, and Southern oceans. Look at the coasts and the interior of the African Continent. Look at the missions established in the different parts of Southern and Eastern India. Look at Greenland, and Iceland, and Lapland. And look at the forests and dark places of our own country. What, I ask, has produced these changes—these unprecedented revolutions in the moral, the civil, and the social condition of these people? What has weaned them from their idols, and brought them to worship the only true God? What has induced them to exchange the instruments of savage and sanguinary warfare, for those of the peaceful and useful arts?—In a word, what has taught them to relinquish the habits and practices of uncivilized life, for the sensible forms of a rational religion, and the quiet institutions of enlightened society? What, I ask, has been the means of doing all this? The question admits of but one answer. The missionary of the cross has been there; the gospel has been translated into their mother tongue; they have learned the doctrines of the christian faith; they have felt the mysterious and transforming influence of revealed truth; and it is this, and this only, that can account for the revolution wrought in both their civil and religious condition.

In an argument on this point, the history of the French revolution should never be passed over in silence. Near the close of the last century, the corruptions and abuses of popery in France, had arisen to a point of extreme aggravation. In a state of society, enlightened as was a large proportion of the French people, a religious system, such as that which then prevailed in that country, could not fail to excite general disgust

and abhorrence. Failing, however, to discriminate between the fundamental principles of the christian faith, and the corruptions which popery had engrafted upon it; and thus taking it for granted that christianity and popery were one and the same thing, the French nation, instead of discarding the corruptions of their religion, unwisely resolved to discard the religion itself. The consequence was a sudden and violent transition from one extreme to the other—from the utmost limits of superstition and religious slavery, to all the excesses of the most licentious scepticism. Christianity was assailed on every hand as a system of imposture, fanaticism, and priestcraft; the Bible was condemned and execrated as the most detestable of impositions; the churches were closed; the institutions of religion were abolished; and the influence of revelation was suppressed, throughout the land. And now observe the consequence. To give the details of this dark and dreadful period, I have now neither the time nor the inclination. Suffice it to say, that principles of the most odious nature sprang up with the rankness and luxuriance of noxious plants; moral corruption spread over the land with the impetuosity of an overwhelming torrent; the landmarks of social order were demolished, and the feelings of humanity and of natural affection were extinguished; anarchy, in its most frightful form, usurped the seats of justice, and took possession of the altars of religion; the will of the mob was made the law of the land; and the nation was drenched in the blood of her most virtuous citizens.

Now the question to be asked here, is this: Had the Bible been given to the people—had the volume of inspired wisdom, rescued from the traditions by which it had been caricatured, been put into the hands of the entire population—had it been permitted to retain its appropriate elevation and influence as the revealed will of the Most High—and, in addition to this, had the churches been kept open, and the forms of the Gospel been observed, and the institution of the Sabbath been respected, and the obligations of a pure christianity been enforced—would these consequences have followed? Would the enormities of the French revolution have ever disgraced the history of nations?—or would the sanguinary proceedings of the National Convention have ever scourged the French people? Beyond a doubt, if we can be permitted to reason from analogy—and this is the only way in which we can reason at all on the subject—this question must be answered in the negative. Most unquestionably, if the enormities of that fearful period are attributable to

any known cause, that cause is to be found in the rejection of the Bible.

If the doctrine of the text has now been established—if it has been shown and received as true, that the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are invested with a moral influence sufficient to renovate the elements of human society—and if it be admitted, moreover, that the said Scriptures constitute the only known instrumentality possessing this influence, then, it must follow, undeniably, that the Bible is the great safeguard of nations; the main preservation from corruption, anarchy, and ruin; and the primary conductor to the highest attainments in social virtue, and in all the blessings of civil and religious freedom. And more especially must it follow that the Bible is the great palladium of our own government—which is essentially popular in its form, and in which every thing depends on the purity of the popular mass.

With a view of illustrating the importance of this conclusion, and particularly under the existing circumstances of this country, I shall take the liberty to descend somewhat into detail.

What then, I ask, are the dangers to which, as a nation, we are at present exposed, and which threaten, to some extent, the destruction of our civil and religious institutions?

I answer, in the first place, we are threatened with the invasion of the "Man of Sin"—with the usurpations of papal tyranny and oppression. I am by no means prepared to admit that the danger on this point is as great as many people imagine; nor do I credit half the alarming statements that are abroad in the land. There are several things, however, touching this matter, which can be neither denied nor disguised. It is not to be doubted, for example, that European Catholics, the Roman Pontiff at their head, are making lofty calculations on the triumphs of their cause in this country. With this view, their population is pouring in upon us like an overwhelming and inexhaustible torrent. Their priests are crowding our seaports, and spreading themselves through the interior; and their treasures are employed, with a vastly increased profusion, in the erection of churches, the establishment of nunneries, and the support of the priesthood. These facts, added to the open avowals, and the bold and presumptuous measures, occasionally witnessed in this country, leave no room for a doubt with regard to the existing schemes of the papal hierarchy. And when to

these considerations are added the zeal which has ever distinguished the partisans of the Romish church, on the one hand, and the excessive apathy and unbelief of nominal Protestants, on the other, it is not to be questioned that the forces of the former are destined to be vastly augmented on this side of the Atlantic. And when it is recollected that Popery is the same thing now that it was eight centuries ago—that it combines the same principles of civil and religious despotism that have hurled monarchs from their thrones and even bound empires in chains, it is easy to see that if this country does not become enslaved, it will not be for the want of an effort to accomplish that object. In short, there is evidently a conflict at hand—a conflict in which the adherents of Popery, and the advocates of civil and religious freedom, will be brought into fearful collision, and in which the liberties of this land will be the price of contention.

If this view of the case be correct, and that it is I can see no cause for a doubt, then the question to be asked, is this: What shall be the mode of defence, and what the means of deliverance? Shall we resort to the sword; to exclusive and oppressive enactments; or to any of the forms of religious persecution? Shall we serve the Catholics as Catholics have been wont to serve Protestants, and repay upon the present generation the long arrears of bloody and vindictive measures? By no means. The voice of religion says, NO; the voice of humanity says, NO; the voice of wisdom and of good policy says, NO. What then should be done?

The answer to this question is obvious. Give the Bible to the people. Let Protestants carry out their principles. Let the ordinances of religion be sustained. Let the public administration of the Gospel be supported. Let the rising generation be taught to read and to revere the oracles of inspired wisdom. But above all, let the copies of the Scriptures be multiplied. Let every house have the Bible—and there is nothing to be feared. The purifying influence of the inspired page will be spread throughout all the avenues and secret recesses of the social mass. And when that influence is felt in an entire community, enlightening the understanding, elevating the desires, liberating the thoughts, and stimulating the moral energies of the population, papal domination will contend in vain.

Another enemy to the civil and religious institutions of this country, is to be found in the various forms of infidelity. It is well known that

there are now organised combinations in several of our cities, instituted for the express purpose of sapping the foundation of revealed religion. With this view the Bible is discarded and stigmatized as a volume of fables; its Author is derided as the foulest of impostors; the forms of religion are ridiculed and despised as the fruit of fanaticism; the Sabbath is habitually and systematically desecrated; and in addition to all the rest, doctrines are boldly propagated, which strike at the root not of Christianity only, but of many of the virtues indispensable to the existence of society. And all this is done in the open face of day, and in the very centres of social and commercial influence. It is upheld and patronised by men of talents, of learning, and of elevated standing in society. And the deleterious influence of such doctrines and such measures, is transmitted through the length and breadth of the nation, by the well known power of the periodical press.

In view of these facts I would say, only let the present system of operations proceed; let such popular teachers as Robert Owen, and Abner Kneeland, and Fanny Wright, have their sway; let such papers as the "Boston Investigator" be circulated and read; let the Bible be set aside, and the institutions of religion be abolished, and the Sabbath be made as other days of the week—and let all this be continued for a succession of years, and let it become general in the nation—and I ask, What will our institutions be worth?—where will be the landmarks of social order?—and where the ensigns of civil freedom?

To answer these questions I happen to have a case in point. I mean the French Revolution. I have already had occasion to allude to this dark point in the history of nations. I have already shown how Romanism gave rise to infidelity, and how infidelity, like a mighty inundation, bursting over its natural barriers, carried moral desolation over the land—sweeping away the tribunals of public and private justice—prostrating all law and social and civil order, and producing the most frightful state of anarchy and ruin that terrified nations ever beheld.

With the horrors witnessed in France in the last century, and the well known cause or causes which produced them, before his eyes,—let no one presume to persuade himself that this nation has nothing to apprehend from the scepticism which is already rife and rampant in the land. Be assured, this system of disorganization and of demoralization must be checked, and in due season too, or succeeding generations

will have cause to mourn over the apathy and neglect of their faithless predecessors.

The question arises here as before—What is the remedy? As before, I answer, THE BIBLE. Only let Christians do their duty by keeping pure the fountains of knowledge, and supporting the regular administration of religious instruction; let the pulpit be supplied with able and faithful ministers, and the Sunday schools with zealous and competent teachers; and above every thing else, let every member of society have his Bible; and the nation can have but little to fear. That Word of Life and consolation which has so often dispelled the clouds of popular delusion; which has so often curbed and subdued the headlong passions of men; which has so often stayed the tide of licentious freedom; and rescued nations from the dominion of Anti-Christ, is the same now that it has ever been. Be assured, my hearers, so long as the people of this nation shall have the Bible—so long as this invaluable volume shall be duly read and respected throughout the country, infidelity will exert its strength in vain.

Another source of danger inseparably connected with the preceding, and not improbably growing out of it, is popular excitement. That the authority of law, in many portions of the nation, has, of late years, been greatly reduced, no one can doubt who is at all acquainted with the present state of the country. Instances of popular violence, in which the majesty of the law has been trampled under foot, and the secular arm has been resisted, and personal rights have been invaded, and the peace and order of society have been violated, have become almost matters of every day occurrence. Of the general correctness of this statement, no one can doubt who has the least familiarity with the history of the times. To what cause or causes these disorders are to be ascribed, it is no part of my present business to determine. Of this, however, we may be assured:—if the evil be not arrested—if the arm of the law, and of the civil magistrate, be not strengthened—if the principle of popular insubordination continue to be tolerated, and the law of mobs be permitted to become the law of the land, then, we may bid farewell to every thing dear in popular rights, in social harmony, and in civil and religious freedom. The nation will become the prey of popular commotion; and the land, the theatre of violence, anarchy, and bloodshed.

Again the question occurs—Where shall we look for the remedy?—

And again I must point to the Bible. I am aware that it may be said, that the immediate remedy is to be found in maintaining the majesty of the laws, and in visiting every offence with its appropriate penalty. Granted. But I ask, how is the secular arm to be strengthened, especially in a Government like this, without a corresponding change in the popular will? And how shall such change be wrought in the popular will, but by first purifying the popular mass? And where is the agent, the Bible excepted, that can produce the requisite renovation in the popular mass?

I must be allowed to say, then, as before, let every man stand at his post; let the copies of the Scriptures be doubled, trebled, and quadrupled; let them be dispersed through the entire length and breadth of the land; let the united weight of Christian influence be brought to bear upon this point;—and the most salutary result may be anticipated. If indeed this mode of operation shall fail—if there be no way by which the public mind can be brought to acknowledge and to feel the power of revealed truth, then, indeed, it is time to despair of the nation. If this remedy shall not succeed, then there is none other to which we can look with the faintest hope of success. If the Word of God shall prove insufficient to stay the torrent of popular violence, which is even now ready to overflow the country, then this fearful torrent must flow on—carrying away with it all that is lovely in social order, and all that is valuable in civil freedom.

Once more—there are those among us, who speak much of their fears from our own clergy. They profess to believe that all the benevolent institutions of the age, Bible societies not excepted, are cunningly devised schemes, contrived by the existing priesthood, for the purpose of enslaving the nation. Without stopping to inquire into the correctness or incorrectness of this view of the case; and granting, for argument's sake, that it is even as stated—granting that the Protestant priesthood of this country, have actually laid their heads together, with the view of enslaving first, the church, and then, the nation—where, it is important to inquire, is the appropriate remedy? Beyond a possible doubt, that remedy is to be found in the Bible. Most unquestionably, if the Bible, as has been all along supposed, and as I must think has been proved, is the great bulwark of civil and religious liberty—the grand engine for neutralizing superstition, and papal domination, and infidel corruption, and political disorder and disorganization,—then

the Bible is the only sure and effectual agency for casting down the supposed loftiness of our own priesthood, and rescuing the nation from its apprehended domination. It is true, agreeably to this view of the subject, that the priests act very absurdly in patronising the circulation of the Scriptures, an agency so well calculated to defeat their alleged intentions;—but this is no concern of ours. The Bible is the certain and effectual antidote against all that threaten the safety of our institutions, from whatever quarter the danger may be supposed to arise; and as such, challenges the support of all who are friends to their country, and their country's good.

Should I happen to be addressing any who are in dread of Bible societies, Sunday schools, &c., to such I would say—My friends, these institutions are the very things you need to prevent the mischief which you profess to apprehend. Let Bible societies be multiplied and sustained—let the Scriptures be circulated and read—let the influence of revealed truth be known and felt throughout the body of the people, and, my word for it, you have nothing to fear from the priesthood, either Catholic or Protestant, either foreign or domestic.

If it be now granted, as it undoubtedly must be, that the Bible is the principal defence of the civil and religious freedom of this nation, then it immediately becomes a matter of the first importance to determine by what means this agency can be brought to exert its full force on the popular mass—so that its renovating influence may be propogated, and its redeeming efficacy may be secured, to the greatest possible extent.

In view of this inquiry, and with a design to give it a proper and satisfactory answer, there are a few particulars which I consider worthy of special attention. They are the following:—

In the first place, the copies of the Scriptures should be multiplied and distributed until every member of society shall have access to the sacred page. I very well know that even this will not secure the object contemplated to its uttermost extent. I know that men may have the Scriptures at hand, and still know but little of their meaning, and even less of their influence; but I also know that, where the Bible is not to be had, it cannot be read—and that where it is not read, it is not apt to be either understood or regarded. I am aware that there may be, and no doubt are some exceptions to this last remark; but I am sure that, as a general rule, the remark is correct; and I am sure, moreover, that as the copies of the Scriptures are multiplied in any given community, in that same proportion their truth will be received, and their influence will be felt.—This conclusion is so obvious, and so well sustained by observation and experience, that I am persuaded it will be neither denied nor doubted by any one at all competent to judge in the case.

To effect this result, if I understand the matter correctly, is the object of the institution, in behalf of which I have now the honor to address you. To carry the word of life to every fireside in the State, and as far as practicable, to secure the reading and understanding of the same, is the principal end for which this Society was formed, and to which its efforts have since been directed. How far its operations have been successful, I have not now the means of knowing; but I know that its object is one of the first importance to the cause of religion, of morals, of humanity, and of national security; that its services

were never more needed than they are at present; and that it deserves the willing patronage of every friend to his country, and of every friend to civil and religious liberty.

I am not unmindful that one serious impediment to the end in view, is to be found in the number of our population who are unqualified to read. This remark leads to another consideration, intimately connected with the preceding, which is worthy of the most solemn attention. He who cannot read, can never be well informed on any subject, either sacred or secular. The Word of God can, therefore, never produce its full and legitimate effect on any community, until the members of that community shall have been qualified to read its pages. And just in the ratio in which the population of this State are unable to read, in that same ratio will the word of inspired wisdom come short of its full and proper results. All this is too obvious to admit of a moment's hesitation.

Where, then, I ask, is the proper remedy? Beyond a possible doubt, the only remedy that the case will admit, is to be found in the education of the people. Let the cause of education be promoted—let the advantages of rudimental learning be afforded to every family—let our entire population be qualified to read the Scriptures—and one serious obstacle to the moral culture of society will be taken away; one of the strong holds of corruption will be broken up; and one important step will be taken towards the preservation of our civil and religious institutions.

It is no part of my duty, on the present occasion, to point out the means of accomplishing this end. This is more properly the work of our philosophers and statesmen. But I consider it my duty to insist on the importance of the thing itself; and I am confident that it is a point on which I am in no danger of insisting too much. The cause of common school education is a cause which demands the earnest and immediate attention of every friend of his country; and a cause which cannot be neglected much longer without the most painful, if not the most disastrous consequences. As has been already observed, even the Bible can avail but little, when men are not competent to read and understand its lessons. You may therefore be assured, my hearers, that, as Christians and as patriots, it behooves you to give instant attention to the matter proposed; and, while benevolently occupied in imparting the Word of Life to all the families of our State, neglect not, I beseech you, the means necessary to secure a more general ability to read and appreciate its precepts.

Another method by which the influence of the Scriptures on the popular mind, might be vastly increased, is the employment of the Bible as a school book. Were the present a suitable occasion, it could be easily shown, that the Bible, considered merely as a literary production, setting aside entirely its peculiar claims as a work of inspiration, is entitled to a conspicuous place in every seminary of learning. This, however, is not the time nor the place for such discussion; nor is it at all necessary to my present object. It is all-sufficient to remark—what must be obvious to every one on reflection—that the practice of employing the Bible as a school book, would give it a powerful ascendency over the popular mind, and would tend directly and vastly to promote the object which we have now in view. To say nothing of the all-important lessons of wisdom, which would be learned by such use of the Scriptures, the minds of the young would thereby conceive a veneration for the revealed will of God, which would rarely fail to be retained through life, and which, under existing circumstances, is very apt to be superseded by neglect and disrespect.

What has led to the exclusion of God's Word from our colleges, academies, and common schools, it is a matter of no importance now to inquire. This much, however, I will say—and it deserves to be duly and solemnly considered—that no method would have been adopted, better calculated to injure the credit of the Sacred Record, and to prejudice the public mind against its utility, than that of which I now speak. How, I ask, could the doctrine have been more scientifically or more successfully inculcated, that the Word of God is unfit for common use—for the contemplation and practice of mankind in general, than by excluding it from our places of learning, and virtually restricting it to the service of the sanctuary.?

I have only to add, on this point, that this is an error which greatly needs correction. The claims of the Bible, and the interests of religion, of morals, of social order, and of national prosperity, all, *all* demand that the word of God should be reinstated in our seats of learning—that it should receive the pre-eminent and universal respect to which it is entitled—and that its moral precepts, its lessons of virtue, and its holy and sublime principles of religion, should be impressed with unsparing attention upon the minds of the rising generation.

Finally, of all others, perhaps the most efficacious means of spreading abroad the influence of inspired truth, is the appropriate use of the pulpit. An enlightened, faithful, devoted ministry, has ever been regarded as the bulwark of the church, and the great instrumentality, second only to the Bible itself, of diffusing the influence of moral and religious truth. All this is so well understood, especially by those whom I now address, that to insist on it further would only be to incur a waste of time.

Then, let every one who admits the value of biblical instruction and biblical influence, use his personal exertions to secure the attainment of an able and faithful ministry, and to sustain the regular administration of the Word of Life; that the public mind may be thoroughly enlightened; and that the moral and religious influence of revealed truth, may be made to operate on every part of the social system.

Such, then, are the means, the more general and efficacious means, of spreading abroad the remedial influence of the Sacred Scriptures. Touching each of these, I have aimed at nothing more than a brief suggestion. More than this, my time did not allow; and more, I presume, the occasion did not demand. The value of an abundant supply of the Book of Life—of common education among the people—of the use of the Bible as a school book—and of an enlightened and efficient ministry, are positions which need only to be stated, to be understood and acknowledged.

It only remains, then, to sum up the argument, and leave it with the audience for their present and future contemplation. My hearers, my appeal is to you, as Christians and as patriots—as the friends of religion, of virtue, of social order, and of civil and religious freedom. Of the present condition of the country, you can be no longer ignorant. That popery, infidelity, political strife, and popular commotion and violence, have already united their energies, and are even now threatening the subversion of our free institutions, can no longer admit of a question. That there is a surprising degree of apathy and insensibility to the dangers which threaten the nation, is no less certain and alarming. Is it not plain, then, beyond the possibility of a doubt, that it becomes every man to awake and stand at his post? Is it not plain that it behooves you, and me, and all of us—every one who loves his country and his country's cause—to gird himself for the onset, and promptly co-operate for the general good?

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